

# St Mary's News

**June 2021**

(not quite out of Coronavirus lockdown)



## *Includes ....*

A Journey of Descents - *The Revd Josh Brocklesby*

Is it Time for a Break? - *Cath Da Costa*

Back in Time: A Royal Visit - *John Way*

*.... and much more!*

## A Journey of Descents



As some of you know I spent a year in the Community of St Anselm, which is a religious community made up of young adults from around the world who take vows for a year and live a life of service and prayer at

Lambeth Palace. It was a truly significant experience for me, not least, as it was during that year while on silent retreat for a month that I made the final decision to accept the call for ordination. But I often reflect on my time there and on the rule of life which we lived by and the part which has had me reflecting the most at the moment is below:

*We choose to descend, we give up self-promotion and preferment. We choose to descend in society when the world is determined to climb. We follow Jesus into suffering and we bring his risen life as we go. Jesus has taught us that his Glory is found by humbling ourselves, because the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of humans.*

This is a pretty radical teaching, one which Jesus promotes regularly, just look at Luke 14.7-11! The idea of descending rather than pursuing self-promotion was one of the things that drew me most to religious life. It feels like to descend through love is how we follow in Jesus' footsteps. Someone who throughout his own life lived this journey perfectly. But I also think it is an example of what a life of loving the other looks like and how it changes things. We don't exalt ourselves, as that means putting us above others, instead we take the lowest seat. There is something special about that. There is something special about why Jesus did what he did, why he lived the life he did and who he was. There is something special about why Jesus made the disciples deeply uncomfortable by his humility perhaps no better expressed then in his act of feet washing. Because he took that lowest seat.

It's a tough calling but it's important to remember Jesus doesn't ask us to do anything he hasn't already done. And in showing us a God who humbles himself he ensures nobody is excluded. If God is in the lowest seat nobody is left behind, nobody is humiliated. If God has taken that place, has taken all of that onto himself, all the shame, humiliation, judging looks from those who see themselves as superior etc., then it means he has brought everyone with him. Jesus therefore has lifted up all. And with a humble king, with a humble God, the places of prestige are flipped on their head. Because now the further up the table you are the further you are from the most esteemed guest.

Can you see how this simple teaching changes everything? Changes our whole outlook on life. The cult of me is destroyed. The individual promotion is destroyed because in pushing ourselves to go above others, in exalting ourselves we exclude ourselves more from those around us and further from God. So Jesus asks us to forget about what we think we are due, what we feel we merit and deserve which is what your place at the table represented in Jewish culture and says instead start of at the bottom with me. Join me. Follow me. It's actually the best place, the more fun place! Break out of your individual-ness and consider others. Because if you place yourself above others then how are you loving them? Even if your aim is to bring them with you up the table, how are you showing them love and what kind of love is that?

What Jesus is saying is not easy. It never is with Jesus. Instead it's uncomfortable. It raises more questions than answers and in doing so it acts as a wake up call. An alarm to our system. A shock to produce thought and reflection. Jesus is really leaving what we choose to do with this teaching in our own hands. It was one of the exciting things of my time in St Anselm to explore how do we live this out in the day to day.



Jesus doesn't give us a manual and say what to do, or how to do it, or exactly what it looks like. Instead he leaves it all open for us to think and discern. What does this mean for me today and how should I react? What would a world look like where love for others overpowered our own selfishness? And in doing so he gives us a glimpse of just what the Kingdom of God really is.

And so at the beginning of this new month perhaps its worth reflecting further on how we follow Jesus, are we willing to give-up self-promotion and preferment when the rest of the world does the opposite? Are we prepared to follow Jesus in humbling ourselves? And if we are what does that look like in our own lives and work? What does it look like in our communities?

Whatever answers we come up with we know that we are not alone in the journey as we follow Jesus who is with us always and wherever he is, is always the best place to be!

God Bless,

Josh



*The Revd Joshua Brocklesby*



## Is it time for a break?

It is Wednesday of half term, the girls, Bruno and I are away in Dorset on holiday – it is the first break we have had away together this year; the first bit of annual leave I have taken as I worked through Christmas and Easter. As you can tell, I am still working a little, but it has been really good to get away from things – to spend time on the beach, taking walks, daring each other into the freezing water, fossil hunting, and eating, ice-cream, cream-teas and fish and chips. Basically, just relaxing, indulging in simple pleasures and letting the stress of work, study and life to slip away for a bit. It has certainly helped that God has blessed us with some wonderful weather!



As we were packing the car my younger daughter, being a prime example of a teenager and deciding last minute she would rather spend her holiday with friends and shopping now that the shops have finally opened again, suddenly demanded “Why do we have to go away to have a holiday?” It made me stop and think! What do I need to be able to truly relax and rest and does it have to involve – or be limited to – the time or two each year when we ‘go away’?

Although I have not totally turned off from work or study, I have taken time out and I feel so much the better for it – more relaxed, energised and inspired – which makes me wonder why I don’t do this more often! Why do so many of us feel compelled to work relentlessly? Life is busy anyway and yet so many of us embrace a workaholic lifestyle. This seems particularly true for those who work within the church amongst whom there seems an almost ingrained need to be busy for God. It isn’t just the perceived custom that ‘you only get one day off’ but seems to hinge on the concept that we are doing this for God so therefore we must do it with all our might, strength and being. More than once people have made comments which, whether they have meant it this way or not, left me feeling guilty for not doing enough – for not doing more! Not to mention that adage: Surely if we are doing God’s work, God will give us the strength and energy we need.

During this pandemic this urge to serve God and His people through this tough time has been relentless and I have seen so many brought down with exhaustion. Is this really what God wants from His people? Does He really measure our devotion to Him through our serving Him until we cannot anymore?

I am left wondering two things:

1. Should we take rest?
2. What form does this 'rest' need to take to have the desired affect?

Firstly, we need rest – most often we think of this as sleep – a vital need like water and food. Some fun facts: go 24 hours without sleep and your brain will show the same decrease in cognitive ability as someone who is drunk; after only three or four nights without sleep you will start to hallucinate; the longest anyone has ever survived without sleep is 264 hours! Rest, however, is not just sleep itself – rest, according to the Cambridge dictionary, is: “To cease work or movement in order to relax, sleep or recover strength”. Rest isn't just for the weak – even God took one!

It states at the end of the first of the creation stories in Genesis 2.1-3:

‘Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work he had done.’

God needed a rest – and who can blame Him after creating all of the world – but if God needed a rest then so do we! More than that, God saw both the need and the benefit of rest as so important that He made this time of rest “holy” and included it in the Ten Commandments – it was a strict part of the Israelites' lifestyle in the Old Testament and became a part of the new church we read of in the New Testament. Read through the Gospels and you may be struck as I am by how many times Jesus rested – and how he encourages his disciples to do so also.

So, what should we do with our ‘Sabbath’? Acts 20:7, Paul speaks about how those within the newly formed church would come together to break bread and for fellowship. Let’s face it though, many of us do use our whole ‘day off’ to do all of that: worshipping God, spending quality time with family and reconnecting with friends and these things can leave us as busy – and as tired – as ever. In Mark 2: 27–28 it says: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath”. Let us break this down a bit.

Firstly, God pronounced the Sabbath as holy (Deut. 5:12), not a day on which to do some holy things. Rest is not the same as making space for worship! I am not saying you shouldn’t go to church on your Sabbath but rather that worship and rest are two different things. Having said that, we read of how Jesus includes God in his whole life including his time of rest – in fact, it is often during those times when the heroes of the bible take time out of life that God meets with them the deepest – similarly God wants to spend time with you every day not just in church on a Sunday morning!

Secondly, it should be a time to reconnect and deepen relationships, but this should be mutually beneficial – our ‘Sabbath’ is important because it allows us to regain our strength but it is also a time when we can regroup: we can find ourselves again and those things that bring us contentment and we find that we develop more on a personal and spiritual level too – as the murk of the business of our lives dissipates, we are reminded of what is really important in our lives and the Sabbath gives us the space to reconnect with these things.

Finally, it should be about rest! Jesus calls us to, “Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.” (Matt 11:28). The Sabbath is a gift from God – like His grace – it isn’t supposed to be some strict rigidly adhered to rule but something to help us find balance in our lives so that we can become well rounded and



developed people and it should leave us feeling fed and refreshed - it is there to bring us joy!

Maybe for some of us the problem is that we need to learn how to rest! As some of you may know, I am not a good sleeper, but through trial and error I have found that certain routines help: a warm bath, relaxing music, relaxation techniques, etc. It is the same with learning to take rest. A friend has recently introduced me to ‘hygge’ which originates in Denmark and means “Quiet comfort” – basically you make a list of all of the things that brings you a deep sense of cosiness, comfort and contentment: this could be anything – a walk along a beach; a warm relaxing scented bath; sitting in front of a fire with scented candles, wearing woollen socks with a cuddly soft blanket and a glass of red wine listening to calming music reading a good book... Okay I was getting carried away with mine – but you get the idea! What would your ‘Hygge fantasy’ be ...and how can you recreate it at home? The idea is to create time at least once a week when you take care of you.

My challenge to you therefore is to find time this week – maybe a whole day – or even book in a week or two – when you can take a break from it all. Take God with you wherever and whatever you do and spend time with Him – but spend time with your partner, family and friends too – but mostly take time for that most precious of persons – yourself! God didn’t make us as work animals – after all, Jesus came to give us a “rich and satisfying life” (John 10:10).

As ever, please do contact me if you have any questions about our Children and Family work here at St Mary’s Watford or if you just want to chat.

God Bless

*Cath Da Costa*  
*Family and Children Worker*

[familyworker.stmaryswatford@gmail.com](mailto:familyworker.stmaryswatford@gmail.com)  
07961564385





# PCC Report – May

## Meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> May – by Zoom

The meeting commenced with a service of Holy Communion and a welcome to new and re-elected members.

*Financial Situation and Appeal* Peter Dean reported that expenditure in April was significantly lower than expected, with the result that the year-to-date balance at the end of the month was a small surplus – but he stressed that we are only one-third of the way through the year. He considered that it was too early to tell the level of response to the appeal but some donations had been received. While these were welcome, stabilising the finances required increased regular giving through Standing Orders.

*Buildings* Roger Courtney said that the boiler in the Church Centre flat needed significant expenditure and might need to be replaced. The proposal for access to the clock gearboxes had been further developed and he expected that it would soon be ready for submission to the DAC.

*Pre-School* Alison Saunders informed the Council that banners publicising the Pre-School had been hung on the Church Centre and under the window of the vestry. The Business Plan had been sent to the PCC but discussion was deferred until June in order that members had more time to consider it.

*Mission Action Plan (MAP)* The Vicar said that his preliminary proposal for the themes of the next three-five year MAP was that these might centre on

- (i) increasing our presence in the parish; we knew that this had a higher proportion of younger adults and we needed to identify changes in our activities that would increase our ability to engage with the parish community;
- (ii) generally raising our profile in Watford both by physical developments (eg a new north entrance) and through such matters our Website and our welcome arrangements; and

- (iii) taking up the principles of Asset Based Church Development (ABCD) and seeking to support and partner individuals and groups who shared our concerns about the world and our society and were seeking better lives for people. He suggested that these themes be developed more fully through Connect Together sessions over the next few months, with perhaps a further special session in the autumn. Bishop Michael had agreed in principle to be with us for such a session.

*Vicar's Report* Tony outlined his expectations about the future opening of the church. He saw a gradual change in the balance between attendance in person and attendance on Zoom after restrictions were lifted and expected that at some point in the summer there would be a change to the 10.30 service with the main activity being that in the church and live-streaming of the service rather than attendance through Zoom. Serving coffee in church would be investigated and children's activities over the summer were also being planned. He did not think that the Church Centre would return to normal use until September or so.

At the conclusion of the meeting Alison Saunders expressed the congratulations and good wishes of the PCC to Tony and Cath on their engagement.

*Roger Courtney*



# Current Affairs Connect Group

## AN EVENING WITH DEAN RUSSELL MP: PART II

*In April, the Current Affairs Connect Group met with Dean Russell, MP for Watford. In the May edition we reported on Dean's personal values and why he entered politics as a Conservative.*

*This second article focuses on our discussions about asylum seekers, cuts to international aid and the domestic impact of climate change. Although Dean stuck fully to the government line on each issue, he listened carefully to our concerns, was impressed with our knowledge and arguments and offered to meet with us again.*

### Asylum seekers

We explained to Dean that the issue for us as Christians is human dignity. The Bible tells us that everyone is made in God's image. Consequently, there are many commands around loving migrants as our neighbour and giving them equitable treatment with the country's citizens and providing properly for them. Jesus was himself an asylum seeker as a child when his parents fled to Egypt to escape Herod.

Philip Bond said our concern was focused on asylum seekers rather than other categories of migrants. He referred to the cost of the present system: according to Priti Patel, the Home Secretary, about £1 billion per year or about £10,000 for each person in the system. He suggested this could be reduced by:

- Giving every asylum seeker the right to work once they have applied for asylum, enabling savings of benefits, and allowing them to pay taxes so they can contribute to society and have a sense of self-worth, in line with Dean's stated personal values.
- Reducing the time it takes to process applications, currently three years on average. This could be vastly reduced if the Home Office adopted a fairer and more transparent approach to assessment rather

than relying on the courts to ensure fairness. St Mary's has experienced this with families who had "a well founded fear of persecution" under the 1951 UN Geneva Refugee Convention and whom we successfully supported in court on appeal.

This would be a win for both asylum seekers and the government. Dean said he was on the Select Committee for Human Rights. He explained there was a lot of illegal activity with organized crime gangs smuggling people into the UK who would be unable to do so through the normal routes. The government was trying to deter this illegal activity while making it easier for asylum seekers at the point where they need to claim asylum. The system was full of people who were coming in illegally, filling up and complicating the entire system from applications to the Home Office to the courts. Genuine asylum seekers would be processed quicker and would be able to get jobs if the system was able to deal with illegal immigrants and the evil smuggling gangs who bring them to the UK at high personal cost, including harvesting their organs.

We asked Dean whether there had been any developments in putting in place an easier system for the genuine asylum seeker to claim asylum before they reached the UK as Priti Patel had given no details on this. Dean replied that these were being explored. The difficulty was that it involved agreeing processes with many different countries, ones which people wanted to flee from; or with a neighbouring country that might suffer repercussions if they agreed to any process. The government has set out its ambition and the initial part of what can be achieved but it would inevitably take time to fully realise.

We asked how it was possible in practice for a person fleeing from a country where they are being persecuted for e.g. their religion, to do so other than illegally and how therefore they get to another country other than illegally. We had in mind, in particular, asylum seekers who wanted to come to the UK because they have relatives here. Dean replied that they should flee to the first safe country, seek asylum there and perhaps later be allocated to the UK if that was their preferred destination. This was the safe, fair thing to do. He reiterated the complicated nature of migration with asylum seekers,

economic migrants and illegal migrants and the way they were exploited by smugglers for large sums of money usually at risk to their lives in unsafe dinghies. He said that what is happening is that people smugglers take asylum seekers from their country of origin through a number of countries in which they could apply for asylum - so going through them illegally where they are not claiming asylum - and bringing them to the UK.

We challenged Dean's 'first country' approach. There was in fact nothing in the 1951 UN Convention that obliged asylum seekers to apply for asylum in the first safe country. Rather, those rules were part of the EU's Dublin's Regulations which the UK had now left. Dean replied he would have to look into that but his point was that people smugglers were selling a dream and exploiting migrants.

## **International Aid**

Andy Roby explained to Dean that the issue for us was the £5 billion cut to the UK's international aid budget announced in November 2020. He recognised that aid - the mere giving of money - was not as good as development - helping people to help themselves. Nevertheless, when the United Nations target of 0.7% of gross national income was adopted by the Cameron administration in 2015 under the International Development Act (IDA), the Department for International Development allocated the money very well.

Andy said that the cut was contrary to the IDA and also the Conservative Manifesto under which the present government was elected and not only potentially illegal but undermines the Government's integrity, given the promises made. The cut is very small when set against the budgets for other areas e.g. health (£230 billion) and hence its rationale is weak. Moreover, as the former Conservative Minister Andrew Mitchell and others have pointed out, we have to tackle a global pandemic so we have to spend internationally e.g. through the COVAX vaccination scheme. We are hosting the Conference of Parties (COP) on Climate Change and the G7 at which we are inviting nations to contribute financially to tackling the problems of climate change. Perhaps worst of all was the impact of the speed and depth

of the cuts on longstanding, high-performing programmes such as clean water, education and in countries such as Yemen. So while the cut was barely enough to cover our weekly national borrowing requirement it was highly damaging to our global leadership, our ability to exert soft power, and to the poor as even the *Daily Mail* has said. We asked Dean how we would vote in Parliament on this and why it was being done in so draconian a way during a global pandemic.

Dean replied firstly that international aid should be about outcomes. He was not a fan of specific amounts of aid as it meant that money would always be spent irrespective of proper priorities. One hears stories about aid spent on Indian or Chinese space programmes for example. There was now an opportunity to prioritise the areas that needed aid most and to ensure that the really good stories get told.

Secondly, the amount that the government is borrowing and spending on the pandemic is unprecedented. Given the public sector freeze of recent times and future cuts that might be needed, notwithstanding the aim to build back better, it would be odd to continue borrowing on the country's 'credit card' for other countries without having a clear pathway to what the money was going towards.

Thirdly, we are in a different period and coming up to the COP and G7 when the emphasis will be in supporting other countries in a number of ways including on climate change, innovation and trade. This seemed a better approach than simply giving away a set pot of money. He recognised that there was a debate to be had about when this temporary cut in aid ended, although this might not be soon. On voting, he felt the cuts were the fair thing to do but wanted to see further effort put into understanding how a smaller pot could be spent on specific projects to deliver the right outcomes.

We pointed out that when the government reduces the aid budget by a third, it is not merely saving the taxpayer a bit of money but causing a lot of harm. The situation in e.g. Yemen was an emergency of apocalyptic scale. The cuts had an impact on the lives of millions of vulnerable people.

Indeed, as Tobias Ellwood (former Conservative Minister in Defence) and others had noted, the savings did not appear to consider the potential additional costs to the UK of e.g. destabilised countries, increased terrorism, migration and enemies such as China and Africa increasing their influence by providing the shortfall. And we had to bear in mind that if we restored programmes in the future we would be doing so against a background of distrust. We would be watching how he voted!

## **Climate change**

Roger Courtney referred to the Lord's Prayer: "Your kingdom come on earth...". Care for God's creation and restoring it to health is a central part of that. Climate change is linked to both migrants and international aid. It is displacing peoples in the countries most affected and International aid mitigates some of its impact in poorer countries. We felt the Government is to be commended for getting the message of climate change and the UK will be chairing COP 26 in Glasgow later this year. It's getting a lot of things right with an impressive number of green measures in place, but it's not going fast enough and there are some gaps. One aspect is to improve the energy efficiency of housing, especially as this would help the poor, about whom the church is always concerned. The recent Report by the Environmental Audit Committee (the Report) stated:

"We consider the Government has significantly underestimated how much decarbonising our homes will cost and it needs to get a grip on this now before it is too late. Energy efficiency is an important precursor to low carbon heating and will put us on the least cost path to net zero."

We have 20 million houses that need to be made energy efficient. To do so by 2040, a million homes a year would need to be improved at around £5,000 each – an annual spend of £5 billion. This is the "least cost path" as the cost of not doing so would be even greater.

Yet, just after the Report's publication, the Government announced the scrapping of the Green Homes Grant Scheme (the Scheme) which had been

the main source of funding. There had been problems with the Scheme but scrapping it had caused a net loss of £1 billion that had been going into improvements at a time when we should be spending around £5 billion a year on them. It's not the first time that a government scheme to support home improvements has been cut short and we need a stable long-term commitment to enable industry to gear up for challenge.

Such schemes are particularly relevant to hard-to-heat housing where more people are likely to experience fuel poverty. And they can potentially provide thousands of jobs, so aiding economic recovery.

There is also an issue with the green' levies that are added to fuel bills to help pay for energy efficiency schemes and subsidies for renewable energy. They are, in effect, a regressive tax since again they bear more heavily proportionately on people with high fuel bills. These measures should be funded from taxation.

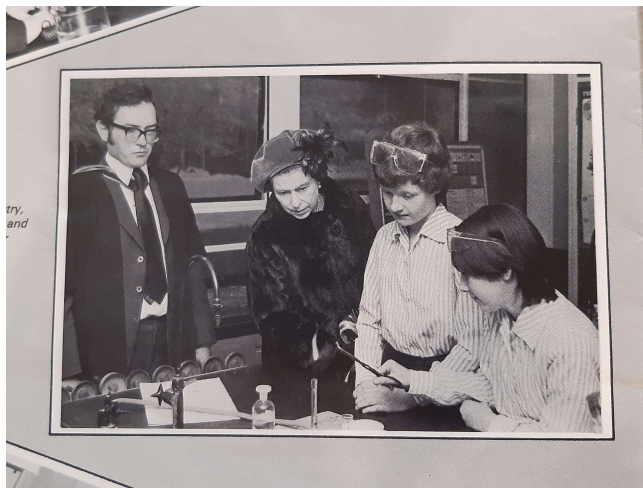
In his response, Dean referred to a Select Committee that had said the Scheme was not being delivered on the ground as hoped. Funding was nevertheless being found for those who are poorest and the Government was considering what other stimulus could be put in place to improve the energy efficiency of homes. The challenge was where to put the focus. Given that the scheme was not working as intended the Government had had to consider whether to continue with the scheme to save face or to replace it with something that would actually deliver. Despite the risk of adverse headlines, it was important to do the adult thing and scrap the scheme for now and the Government had had the courage to do that. There was essentially no disagreement between his views and ours – it was really a question of how to get to the desired outcome. The Government was open to ideas and he encouraged us to send in ours.

*The Current Affairs  
Connect Group*



## Back in time – A royal visit

*Andy Roby saw this photo on a social media page recently and so we had to ask John Way about the occasion.*



*This is his reply:*

It was December 11th 1981 - in my third year of teaching at Parmiter's. There I was, teaching this class (in full academic dress, which was quite unusual, even then) and this woman in a fur coat turned up and started asking questions.

We had come back to school in September and the Headmaster had announced that Her Majesty had agreed to come to the school in December to celebrate 300 years of the school's foundation (it had been in London and had completed its transition to being a Hertfordshire school only in July of that year). She also laid the foundation stone to a new building (I think the English Block). Each department had to put on a show to impress her with the sort of things we did and this was the Chemistry department's contribution.

Obviously there had been a lot of planning, down to the finest detail (although I seemed to have omitted to say how safety spectacles should have been correctly used!). What we couldn't prepare for was that the night before we had a very rare event - heavy snow before Christmas. There were a lot of frenzied phone calls between the school and the Palace but, apparently, The Queen insisted that she would come rather than disappoint children. It really was bad snow; a colleague of mine who lived in Chorleywood couldn't get out of her drive and had to miss the day. The rumour is that Hertfordshire used up their year's allocation of rock salt clearing the northbound M1, a bit of the North Orbital Road and High Elms Lane. It snowed again during the morning so more grit went down. The royal cars arrived exactly on time and everything went without a hitch. At the end The Queen was whisked away in a helicopter as she was spending the weekend with Princess Anne in Gloucestershire.

So, it was very eventful in ways we hadn't expected but a very memorable occasion in the life of the school and of those staff and students who had made it in through the snow. Ever since then the school has called the day's holiday which it has in the first week of December, the Queen's Holiday.

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## Three Stories



**1. Once, all villagers decided to pray for rain, on the day of prayer all the People gathered but only one young boy came with an umbrella. - THAT'S FAITH!.**

**2. When you throw a baby in the air, he laughs because he knows you will catch him.- THAT'S TRUST!.**

**3. Every night we go to bed, without any assurance of being alive the next Morning but still we set the alarms to wake up.- THAT'S HOPE!.**

## Services

The Church is open  
on Wednesdays each week  
between 12.00noon and 2.00pm  
for Private Prayer

### Sunday

10.30 am Morning Service in church and via Zoom;  
(*in church for those not able to access online*)  
5.30 pm Reflection via Facebook

### Wednesday

12.30 pm Reflection in church  
followed by Holy Communion  
Reflection also available via Facebook

### Monday to Saturday

Morning Prayer via the Church website

Please keep up to date with what is on offer  
via our Facebook page  
or the website [www.stmaryswatford.org](http://www.stmaryswatford.org)

# Who's Who at St Mary's

*(They all continue to be available via the phone or online)*

## Vicar

The Revd Tony Rindl | 01923 225189 / 07792 505480  
[tonyrindl.stmaryswatford@gmail.com](mailto:tonyrindl.stmaryswatford@gmail.com)

## Curate

The Revd Joshua Brocklesby | 07764 738596  
[jbrocklesby.stmaryswatford@gmail.com](mailto:jbrocklesby.stmaryswatford@gmail.com)

## Churchwardens

Alison Saunders | 01923 244390  
Peter Dean | 07876 154387

## Children & Families Worker

Cath Da Costa | 07961 564385  
[familyworker.stmaryswatford@gmail.com](mailto:familyworker.stmaryswatford@gmail.com)

## Office

[office@stmaryswatford.org](mailto:office@stmaryswatford.org)  
St Mary's Church, Church Street, Watford WD18 0EG  
*currently only open on a Monday morning*

[www.stmaryswatford.org](http://www.stmaryswatford.org)